GUY DEBORD IS REALLY DEAD

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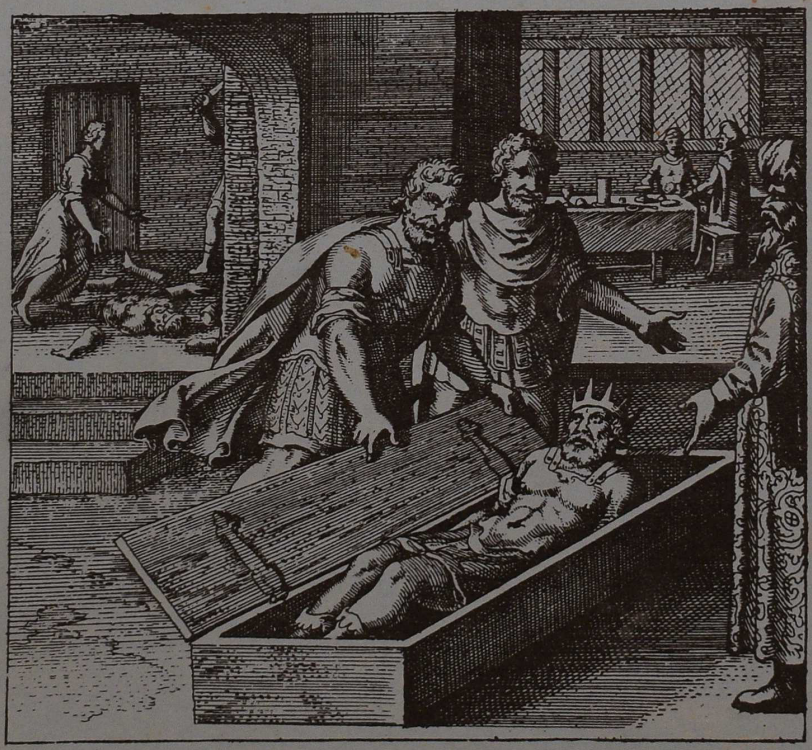

by Luther Blissett

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INTRODUCTION

Orthodox Marxism... does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the 'belief' in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a 'sacred' book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to method.

Georg Lukács

A lot has been written about the situationists in recent years and most of these commentaries aren't worth the paper they are printed on. The text that follows is different, hacked out immediately after Guy Debord's suicide, it is the product of a radical milieu who've been detourning the works of theorists as diverse as Toni Negri, Deleuze & Guattari, Paul Virilio and Amadeo Bordiga. However, above everything else, this fertile theory is the product of concrete engagement in the new wave of social struggle that encompasses plagiarism, the avant-bard, pranks, scandals and the creation of urban myths. It is precisely this engagement in practical activity, and the accompanying reuse and devaluation of the past, that has allowed Luther Blissett – 'a name that can be used by anybody' – to produce his biting critique of Debord. To this ludic excursion, I have added

as an appendix an excerpt from *A Field Study In The Dwindling Force Of Cognition, Where It Is Least Expected: A Critique of the Situationist International as a Revolutionary Organization* by Robert Chasse and Bruce Elwell (composed in the immediate aftermath of their expulsion/resignation from the SI in January 1970), since if this revealing text were better known, many of the myths propagated by pro-situ apologists would be recognised as historically untenable. Anyone wishing to understand the history of the American and British sections of the SI will find the anthology *Black Mask & Up Against The Wall Motherfucker: The incomplete works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea and the Black Mask group* (Unpopular Books and Sabotage Editions, London 1993) an indispensable aid to their enquiries.

Bourgeois 'good taste' teaches respect for the dead (as well as bosses, cops, intellectuals &c.), whereas Luther Blissett, coming as he does from the 'other side,' is utterly shameless in displaying his 'bad taste.' His text will be about as welcome as a slap in the face among those who falsely imagine that history can be fixed once and for all. It follows, of course, that Blissett's essay is merely one way of understanding the SI; by simultaneously viewing other discourses – for example the occult – as practical guides that enable us to look at the situationists in equally productive ways, we remain true to the 'orthodox' spirit of critique and discovery, that is to say psychogeography. In order to avoid complacency, it is necessary to draw up new emotional maps that re-charge the force of our understanding. In the case of the SI, and much of the counter-culture, this means at some stage we must adopt drugs as a prism through which to interpret their activities. Certainly, it is possible to read *Cain's Book* by the British situationist Alexander Trocchi (John Calder, London 1963), as a fictionalised exercise in autobiography, and thus arrive at the conclusion that Gil J. Wolman and Mohamed Dahou, two members of the Lettrist

International, played a key role in the Parisian hash trade of the fifties. This, in turn, sheds fresh light on the report in an issue of *Potlatch* that the café frequented by the 'ultra-lettrists' had been rammed by a car. Although Wolman fell out with Debord prior to the founding of the SI, Dahou's involvement might explain why The Bore – in a letter to Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio dated 17/7/58 – complained that the cops, having mistaken the SI for gangsters, were trying hard to intimidate them. Trocchi, of course, is celebrated for his use of drugs – and another British situationist, Charles Radcliffe, was busted for peddling spliff, having been the 'Mr Big' of the English hash trade until he was largely squeezed out of its wholesale end by his sometime associate Howard Marks. But that is another story, what follows is chiefly concerned with the SI's failed assault on the totality...

Stewart Home,
London October 1995.

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1. NUNC EST BIBENDUM

Butch, whose motorcycle is this? – It's a chopper.–Whose chopper is this? – Zed's.–Who's Zed? – Zed's dead, baby... Zed's dead.

Quentin Tarantino, 1994.

When Guy The Bore died[1] the reformist press in Italy ran misleading obituaries which surprised no one. The same pusillanimous pundits who regurgitated Karl Popper's tedious tirades against TV, after swallowing the positivist hack's propaganda whole, now celebrate The Bore as a prophet of Berlusconi's current hegemony. For years, the leftist Ignoranzhia confused the 'spectacle' with the establishment's

insolence in the media, or with the triumphant eclipse and re-emergence of individuals such as Letizia Moratti[2] or Sgarbi-and Ferrara-style TV rows.[3] It's no surprise then, that a critical theory attacking commodification and the system of production which turns *each of us* into insolent tools of the establishment, has been defused by a metonymy – the effect rather than the cause, the container rather than the content. To the expert recuperators, defusing this badly made bomb was a piece of piss. Nevertheless, The Bore merits being rescued from a pantheon of leftist heroes that includes Pajetta and Berlinguer[4] which is where *catto-togliattiani* intellectual gravediggers wish to entomb him as a heretic.

The abuse of the epithet 'situationist' and the completely meaningless term 'situationism'[5] occurs thanks to Debord's emphasis on contemplation of the spectacle. *Savoir vivre*, subversion of everyday life, psychogeography and unitary urbanism – in a word, the whole range of immediate and practical actions suggested by the situationists – are given little consideration. Thus 'situationist' is no longer an informative term; cultural reporters attach it to any personage or artistic movement nihilistic enough to be considered 'extreme', or, indeed, spectacular enough to allow for a second-class mass media mythology. Thus, the TV schedule of Italia Uno – decided by Carlo Freccero[6] – is 'situationist', as well as *Striscia la Notizia* ,[7] and TV-truth on Guglielmi's *Raitre*:[8] any text written in a schizo-epigrammatic style is 'situationist', and so on. Most of those responsible for this 'wild labelling' haven't even thumbed through *The Society of the Spectacle* but, treating it as a Talmud of radical critique – although it can be better understood as a series of crossword clues – find in it the message they seek. 'Situationist' is now a potent elixir promoted as a justification for anything from half-baked dadaism to easy-minded technological millenarianism.

In a nihilistic world, whatever is real, is 'situationist'. After all, Debord self-consciously transformed himself a spiteful Cassandra. He chose to allow his best known essay to be taken as Gospel Truth. In 1992, in order to explain the fall of so-called 'socialism' in Eastern Europe, he simply recycled two laconic theses on bureaucracy written 25 years earlier and entombed in his 'major work'.[9] During the final decade of his life, The Bore endlessly sought a suitably historical context for his dramatis persona. Like the prisoners in Kafka's short story *In the Penal Colony,* he stepped into a machine that tattooed onto his body not only his texts (*Considerations sur l'assassinat de Gérard Lebovici, Panegyrique, Commentaires sur la societè du spectacle, Cette mauvaise réputation...*) but also the Law. In this case, the Law was the Right Interpretation of the historical experience of the SI and its protection against slander, against passive contemplation and finally, against pro-situ misinformation.[10] The almost seamless hyper-textual cross-references (from one line of the body-text to the other) are a screen, a desperate measure to hide the means by which The Bore set up his *canonical* bad reputation, fostered the *canonical* style of contemplation, disseminated *canonical* misinformation. In short, set up a control system by freezing Situ-speak into a dead metaphysical language. Such a task involves the whole system and requires a group strategy: if a Free Spirit tries to grasp this discourse, s/he will obtain the very opposite of what s/he seeks. The situationists used to care about acting and speaking with panache, now their Identity must be defended, despite the fact that a fixed Identity freezes and kills this erascible elan, and strengthens the spectacle.

Thus, after The Bore's suicide, we've inherited a body of rules for the realisation of our own 'autonomy', alongside a collection of prophetic texts every bit as dry as the bones of a Catholic 'saint'. On a purely empirical basis, it seems that only two things can be done with The Bore's holy writ: it can be imbibed literally, thereby transforming those who venerate it

into fundamentalists, or it can be taken to mean anything at all by individuals who haven't even read the 'immortal' words of Saint Guy. The culpable failure of the SI inevitably led to this frigidity, a debacle which predates the group's 1972 dissolution by a decade and was the direct result of the French section – following on from the experience of Lettrism – attaining complete control of the organisation. Before the air becomes too thick with the 'thunder' of pro-situ insults, it will be productive to provide an explanation of our position. Likewise, it should not be forgotten that it's a very long time indeed since this rift between the SI and our tendency grew up, and this rupture will shape the following text. The SI was strongly influenced by avant-garde language and myths, and as Asger Jorn said in 1960 'every avant-garde grows old and dies without seeing its successors, because succession doesn't follow in a straight line, but through contradiction'.

2. NOTES FOR A COUNTER-HISTORY OF THE SI

> *The failure of most situationists to understand the nature of catastrophe and to run alongside this crisis serves to illustrate our point. Panic can be an incredible energiser.*
>
> Mark Downham, 1988

Very few of the imbeciles who witter on about 'situationism' are able to explain the exact nature of the programme those who founded the SI wished to pursue. Style victims may chatter about 'creating situations' without knowing that this means seeking out temporary ambiences, characterised by a superior passional quality. Unitarian urbanism was the chosen method of achieving the situationists' aims. There was, for example, a

proposal to create a city with areas to satisfy every mood, each quarter of the town provoking a simple feeling, to which the subject consciously exposed him or herself. This necessitated a new architecture which played on the different atmospheres of rooms, colours, streets; an ambience connected with the actions they'd facilitate. Equally important was psychogeographical exploration of city sites: 'active observation of today's urban agglomerates and the establishment of hypotheses on the structure of a situationist city'.

The SI's ultimate aim was 'the invention of essentially new games... to increase the non-mediocre part of living and reduce null moments as much as possible... The situationist response to the passage of time and emotion is the gamble of always being in advance of change, going forever further into this game and increasing its impassioned moments'. The capitalist way of life was to be challenged by fostering more desirable possibilities, 'to destroy, by all the hyper-political means, the bourgeois ideal of happiness'. This was the significance of Debord's subtle *plagiarisms* of famous marxist phrases: 'Emotions have been interpreted sufficiently: it is now a question of finding new feelings'. These were, in turn, connected to a theoretical outlook that foresaw a 'quick and continuous increase in free time, at the peak the productive forces have reached in our age'. 'Today the ruling class recuperates the free time won by the revolutionary proletariat, by developing a broad based entertainment industry which demeans workers with the by-products of ideology and the tastes of the bourgeoisie'. The situationists' aim was to discover new means of action 'easily recognised in the domain of culture and customs but applied to the perspective of a fusion of all revolutionary changes'.

Most recent use of the word 'situationist' is banal and has very little to do with this programme. Responsibility for such

reductionist usage must be laid at the feet of The Bore and his immediate circle because, at a certain stage, the SI itself stopped being *globally* situationist, and the word followed this process of involution. As everyone knows, from 1957 onwards, the SI repudiated and banished members, behaving as a sect; theory was blatantly detached from praxis, and the organisation was left with Guy Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti as its only active members (although the names Jeppesen Victor Martin and Ivan Chtchegeglov swelled the SI's official membership in 1972 to four) and was then dissolved with the public document *La véritable scission dans l'Internationale* (Champ Libre, Paris 1972). Reading this document, examined below, is like listening to someone use their arse as a trumpet.[11] With its frequent expulsions, the SI aped the surrealist movement, whose heritage, including a typical avant-garde use of judicial language, was a major influence on the French situationists. At times, these exclusions encompassed entire national sections of the SI, most notably the German group SPUR. In this, and several other areas, the theory and practice of the organisation were at odds with each other.

In 1957 Debord wrote that: 'We have to eliminate the sectarianism among us that opposes unity of action with possible allies for specific goals and prevents our infiltration of parallel organisations. From 1952 to 1955 the Lettrist International, after some necessary purges, continually moved towards a sort of absolutist rigour, leading to an equally absolute isolation and ineffectuality, and ultimately to a certain immobility, a degeneration of the spirit of critique and discovery. We must definitively supersede this sectarian conduct in favour of real actions. This should be the sole criterion on which we join with or separate from comrades.'[12] From the start, the French section was characterised by a paranoid and conspiratorial 'rigour' predicated on the use of Hegelian rhetoric as a bulwark against internal and external criticism. In the end, this resulted in

pointless expulsions,[13] fostered a contemplative attitude and resulted in passivity, the blame for which, as has been made clear, was laid at the door of everyone except those who were actually responsible, that is to say The Bore and his immediate circle. By 1960 the Dutch and the Italian sections of the SI had been decimated through expulsions. The Dane Asger Jorn, one of the most important members of the SI, whose texts surprise and delight contemporary readers,[14] resigned in 1961. The German SPUR group caused several scandals and outraged the cultural establishment. At the fourth congress of the SI (London 24-28 Sept. 1960), SPUR attacked the French and over the next 16 months proved to be the most active national section. They were expelled from the SI in January 1962 for refusing to accede to the administration of their eponymous review being relocated to Paris.

In March 1962, the former Scandinavian and German sections founded the Second Situationist International, and in the following years they issued two papers (*Drakabygget* and *Situationist Times*), organised around the following programme: 'The point of departure is the dechristianisation of Kierkegaard's philosophy of situations. This must be combined with British economic doctrines, German dialectic and French social action programmes. It involves a profound revision of Marx's doctrine and a complete revolution whose growth is rooted in the Scandinavian concept of culture. This new ideology and philosophical theory we have called situology. It is based on the principles of social democracy in as much as it excludes all forms of artificial privilege.'[15] Stewart Home's comment is that: 'Not only has Europe traditionally seen itself as the centre of the world, but Britain, France, and Germany tend to see themselves as the hub of this centre. Thus, when the SI split in two, from a French or Anglo-American perspective, the specto-situationists based in Paris were seen as the *real* SI, while the 2nd International centred on Scandinavia could be

dismissed as "foreign to the SI; much more sociable, certainly, but much less intelligent" (IS 8, Paris 1963).'[16] The French section attempted to explain away these purges as the product of a conflict between 'revolutionary' and 'artistic' tendencies within the SI. As far as art is concerned, the Parisians and their allies adhered to slightly less idealistic positions than the 'Nashists', as the 2nd SI was spitefully renamed by the French.[17] Both tendencies claimed to be revolutionary.

The Parisians certainly issued more coherent and radical statements than their rivals. Drawing on the German and Dutch left-communist traditions taken up by *Socialisme ou Barbarie,* the French called for the immediate establishment of Workers' Councils, although 'they never really did anything to put this into practice'.[18] Perhaps because they feared the dogmatic attitude of their French cousins, the 2nd SI never elaborated a clear political programme, focusing their attention instead upon unitary urbanism and the experimental behaviour associated with it. Each 'International' took up a different part of the initial situationist programme, and as a direct result, both tendencies failed to realise the aims of the original group founded in 1957. The Parisians are often written about as though they had a wider influence than the 2nd SI. In particular, they are said to have played a major role in the events of May 1968, although such a view is historically untenable being *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. The well-known scandal of Strasbourg in 1966 certainly inspired those who, two years later, tore up paving stones in the French capital. It's also true that the Situationists coined some of the best slogans of the movement. Nevertheless, the practical effect of their political critique on these events has been hugely inflated by historians, journalists and other pro-situ apologists.

If the influence of the situationists had really been a major factor in the May events, it would be hard to explain the

triumphant re-emergence of Maoism and Trotskyism in the following months, not to mention the crisis which led to the SI's dissolution four years later. Actually, as the events of May '68 unfolded, the SI was already drowning in a maelstrom of incoherence, and these structural and theoretical complications proved fatal to the health of the organisation. Our French comrades at the *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, whose critique of the SI is certainly very different from the one being developed here, have sumptuously outlined these inconsistencies: 'Situationist theory criticised politics without caring too much for the means of its revolutionary realisation, leaving this task to Workers Councils, despite the fact that these had not actually been founded; as a consequence, practice was left undeveloped as regards tactics and the search for necessary compromises: both the external ones (i.e. the convergence between a radical theory still in the making and a radical practice that was, in its turn, fragmentary and incomplete) and the internal ones (i.e. the methods of organisation which make the coherent appropriation of a critique possible). The myth of a total fusion of theory and practice, which the SI believed it had actually realised, and the myth of a revolution that will actuate this fusion in society at one go – the latter being the historical counterpoint of the former – adversely affected a proper understanding of what the Situationists actually should have done together'.[19]

Unfortunately, the EdN doesn't address the fact that the expulsion and mockery of those who refused, even if only partially, these promethean hallucinations, is a structural cause – rather than a mere superstructural effect – of the 'Debordist' myth. These 'former situationists' were initially branded as 'indulgent' and 'inefficient',[20] before finally becoming ensnared in art and idealism, while their contribution – if fused with the theoretical rigour of the French section – would have given the situationist programme newer and wider opportunities of

application and success. The role of the 2nd SI and the other expelled members has been ignored and underestimated for too long. Here in Italy, nobody knows very much about it. The stigma of excommunication lingers on and the francocentric perspective is still dominant. After the split, both Internationals continued to use scandal as a political weapon. But while the Strasbourg scandal, a stroke of luck that was very well exploited and propagandised, gave the Parisians a thrust that allowed them to wash their bollocks in the 1968 agitations, the 2nd SI was unable to go beyond what is today called a 'kreative' approach, and so they slowly imploded. And yet the 'Nashists' had an indirect influence on the '68 movement both in Europe and all over the world, as did many other former members of the SI.

Dieter Kunzelmann, an ex-SPUR member and a contributor to *Situationist Times,* helped found Kommune 1 in West Berlin. Kommune 1 appealed to the young, challenged Leninist idiocy within the SDS and made a major contribution to that organisation, as well as the wider anti-authoritarian movement in Germany.[21] Prior to this, Constant, a former Dutch member of the SI – who The Bore, sometimes with justification, vilified – played a major role in the important PROVO movement, which was centred on Amsterdam and active throughout the 1965-67 period. Before being recuperated by the omnivorous institutions of liberal Holland, PROVO's scandalous activities inspired the young in many different parts of the world.[22] In Notting Hill, the former British section of the SI issued pamphlets and a tabloid paper called *King Mob,* as well as initiating many provocations. For example, King Mob re-staged an American Motherfucker intervention in London, this entailed a member of the group attempting to expropriate a department store disguised as Santa Claus. Malcolm McLaren was familiar with these activities and his antics as manager of the Sex Pistols show that he

assimilated both positive and negative aspects of the Strasbourg and later Motherfucker scandals, which so swayed his subcultural development, as well as that of King Mob. Thanks to these influences, McLaren and his close associate Jamie Reid developed a taste for new forms of communication: 'manifestos, leaflets, collages, pranks, misinformation – which gave a growing feeling that the state of things could be shaken, if not irreversibly transformed'.[23]

The expelled situationists didn't end up in the trashcan of history. Nevertheless, the coherence of the various historical accounts made from a francocentric perspective[24] rests on the claim that these groups and movements based their practice on remnants of a second-rate theory that owed whatever radicality it happened to possess to the *blue blood* which remained after they quit the right salons. No one who says this can be taken seriously, they are a pro-situ. Critical theory is not 'transcendental', it moves in contradiction to the venom of exemplary action. It's true that if the *whole* situationist programme had been re-charged in the social struggle, it would have accelerated the unfolding of events, but this failed assault on the totality is the responsibility of all the situationists – including Debord, Sanguinetti and Vaneigem. And what is more, every salon is inherently wrong.

3. A NEW YEAR'S EVE IN NAPLES

The present day wretchedness works retroactively.

Karl Kraus

It is necessary to examine and deconstruct the *Thèses sur l'Internationale Situationniste et son temps* – the text that kicks off

the Dance Macabre of *La véritable scission* – in order to understand how Debord's style degenerated into a fossilised poetics of rancour, thereby creating his persona as The Bore. Firstly, it must be said that the *Thèses* are a *kitsch* text. 'Kitsch' is used here in the classic sense, which was elucidated by Tommaso Labranca in the book *Andy Warhol era un coatto - Vivere e capire il Trash* (Andy Warhol Was An Urban Hillbilly: Living and Grasping Trash Culture, Ed. Castelvecchi, Rome 1994). The post-68 SI with Debord/The Bore at the helm was kitsch because the 'organisation' hoped to flush away all the shit that surrounded it through the expedient of self-historicisation. This excremental process entailed making endless references to Marx and Bakunin's First International, the title of the *circulaire publique* is merely one of these allusions. The SI attempted to emulate an elevated model, but failed spectacularly. Does an international with only two active members make sense at all? Instead, The Bore and Sanguinetti obtained a *trash* effect – failed emulation, inconsistency, maximalism, all the ingredients of kitsch are on open display in the SI's final texts.[25] Fearing they would be identified with their failures – with *trash*, with *misère* – Sanguinetti and The Bore attributed whatever they considered low and poor to other people or to other causes: pro-situ stupidity, the impotence of former comrades, the 'delay' of the real movement described in the situationist programme, and so on. This failed attempt to flush away all the shit that surrounded the SI was a kitsch farce; the direct product of Sanguinetti and The Bore finding themselves 'surrounded, sinking and choking in shit *(trash)* and everyday (having to) fight a strenuous battle to hide it' (Labranca, op. cit.).

The *Thèses* are a kitsch masterpiece that slide down 'the dogmatic slope that leads to judgements of history made according to an external rule – e.g. councilist teleology. Following this approach, the SI and its supporters too often

contemplated the broadly based subversive movement solely from the perspective of its delay with regard to the situationists' historical programme. The situationists failed to see that this 'delay' was actually a flaw in their programme – most obviously in the form of its abstract generality – as if the only task of the subversive movement was to follow the schedule the SI had laid down. Indeed, as if revolutionary theory had nothing left to learn from the actual revolutionary movement'.[26] In fact, this is kitsch. Thesis 2 of *Thèses sur l'Internationale Situationniste et son temps* states that 'never had such an extremist project, declaring itself in an epoch which seemed to be so hostile to it, affirmed in such a short time its hegemony in the struggle of ideas, product of the history of class struggles. The theory, the style, the example of the SI are adopted today by thousands of revolutionaries in the principal advanced countries but, much more profoundly, it is the whole of modern society which seems to have convinced itself of the truth of the situationist perspectives, whether to realise them or combat them.' Thesis 3 asserts: 'The SI succeeded simply in that it expressed "the real movement which abolishes the existing conditions" and that *it knew how to express this:* that is to say how to begin to make heard to the subjectively negative part of the process, to its "bad side", its own unknown theory... Finally, it is not therefore a question of a theory *of the SI,* but of *the theory of the proletariat.*' Thesis 6 hammers home this point: 'The French branch of the Holy Alliance of the possessors of society... discovers that the movement of occupations had unfortunately some ideas, and that they were situationist ideas: even those who ignore them seem to determine their positions from them.'

After this boastful talk, it is a pleasant surprise to move on to theses 10 to 20 which are lucid meditations on the economy, pollution, the 'symptoms of the crisis' and the workers' struggle. For example, thesis 17 cuttingly states that 'Pollution and the proletariat are today the two concrete sides of the *critique of*

political economy.' It is with thesis 21 that kitsch reasserts itself and announces its final victory over whatever theoretical qualities still lurked inside Sanguinetti and The Bore's heads: 'when all the conditions of social life change, the SI, at the centre of this change, sees the conditions in which it had acted transformed faster than all the rest. None of its members could ignore it, nor thought of denying it, but in fact many of them *did not want to lay a hand on the SI.* It is not even past situationist activity that they made themselves the guardians of, but of its *image*'. From here to thesis 44, there is a long tirade against prositus and 'contemplative' former members, most especially Raoul Vaneigem. The beginning is promising: 'An inevitable part of the historical success of the SI led it in turn to be *contemplated,* and in such a contemplation the critique without concessions of all that exists came to be *appreciated positively* by an ever-widening sector of the impotence itself become pro-revolutionary.'

This really is all too revealing, after imbibing thesis 22, the reader is left with the aftertaste of an *excusatio non petita* [unrequired justification, t.n.]: 'No historical thought can dream of guaranteeing itself in advance against all incomprehension or falsification. As already it does not claim to bring to bear a definitively coherent and accomplished system, so even less could it hope to present itself for what it is in a manner so perfectly rigorous that idiocy and bad faith would find themselves forbidden to each of those who would have anything to do with it; and in such a way that a true reading of it would be universally imposed. Such an idealistic pretension only supports itself by a dogmatism, always doomed to fail; and dogmatism is already the inaugural defeat of such thought. Historical struggles, which correct and improve all theory of this kind, are equally the terrain of errors of restrictive interpretation as, frequently, the self-interested refusals to admit the most unambiguous meaning. Here the truth can only

impose itself in becoming practical force.' Sanguinetti and The Bore conclude the thesis by claiming that situationist theory – i.e. the theory of the proletariat, as stated in thesis 3 – even if it is often misunderstood and deformed, 'will know how to return in all its authenticity each time historically that its hour is come, beginning with today even. We have left behind the epoch where we could be falsified or effaced *without appeal,* because from now on our theory benefits, for better and for worse, from the *collaboration* of the masses.'

According to Sanguinetti and The Bore, the SI's 'historical success' lies in persuading the masses to 'collaborate' in the elucidation of proletarian theory, i.e. in persuading the proletariat to collaborate with itself! Examining the text more closely, it becomes apparent that the 'theory of the proletariat' was not formulated by the class itself, but, in the end, the class was allowed to *co-elaborate* this theory. 'Co' means 'together with'... With whom? Who was co-starring in this articulation of class theory if not the SI? In short, this is the old idealist fallacy of Holy Spirit descending into unconscious matter, of 'consciousness being brought in from outside'. There, standing against the light, is the decrepit figure of the 'separate intellectual' who 'goes towards the people.' Drawing on the legacy of Russian populism, Bakunin and Lenin had previously made an identical error; history repeats itself, the first time as farce, the second as tragedy and finally, as the Situationist International. What could *'of* the proletariat' mean if it doesn't refer to this historical subject? Sanguinetti and The Bore are describing a theory *'about* the proletariat' rather than a theory *'by* the proletariat'. Despite the bald references to 'historical struggles', this theory turns out to be meta-historical, ready to reveal itself whenever the time is right. At a conscious level within this and other texts, the SI repudiated separation, meta-historical phenomena &c. Debord and Sanguinetti appear to be aware of this inconsistency, therefore they come along with an

excusatio non petita: 'of course, it's obvious that we've never believed...' They attempt to hide this shit and, as soon as they smell something resembling a stink, they rush to announce: 'This is not what we are!' But it IS, and this is the essence of kitsch.

The tirade against pro-situs begins with thesis 25: 'all of them make it known that they approve integrally of the SI, and do not know how to do anything else'. According to thesis 26, 'the pro-situ milieu possesses nothing but its good intentions'. It is here that the first explicit reference to the dissolution of the SI appears: 'if the SI continued imperturbably, in other circumstances, to play as before, it could have become the last *spectacular ideology* of revolution, and answered for such an ideology. The SI would have then risked shackling the *real situationist movement*: the revolution'. It is then claimed that pro-situs contemplate the image of a 'situationist aristocracy' they in fact wish to enter, and this 'appearance of hierarchic worth' is explained away as the result of former members, and especially Raoul Vaneigem, seeking veneration on the basis of their membership of the SI. Thus pro-situs, as well as *Vaneigemists*, are 'the product of the weakness and the general inexperience of the new revolutionary movement' (thesis 32). Following on from this there is a detailed analysis of the social origins of pro-situs, it is laced with some amusing observations about the difference between the new 'cadres' and the old petit-bourgeoisie. This theme runs through to thesis 38, finally being replaced by 'criticism' of the SI, or rather, the passivity of some of its members. Thesis 42 begins: 'The contemplatives in the SI were the *perfected* pro-situs, for they saw their imaginary activity confirmed by the SI and by history'. Thesis 44 sheds further light upon this statement: 'Those who, instead of affirming and developing their real personality in critique and decision on what the organisation at every moment does or could do, indolently chose systematic approbation, wanted nothing other

than to hide this externality by their imaginary identification with the result.'

Sanguinetti and The Bore are spent, the 'tirade' is over. Theses 45 to 61 form the conclusion. Thesis 52 asserts that in 'periods where revolutionaries find themselves obliged, even if they want to ignore it, to play with the fire of hierarchy, and do not all, as the SI has had, have the strength not to burn themselves with it; *historical theory is not the place of equality,* the periods of equal community are there its blank pages'. According to thesis 53: 'situationists are now everywhere, and their task is everywhere... As for us, we no longer have to *guarantee* in any way that such and such individuals are not situationists, for *we no longer need to,* and we never have liked to... The very term "situationist" was only employed by us to *pass on,* in the renewal of the social war, a certain number of perspectives and theses'. After several variations on this theme, thesis 58 proclaims: 'the veritable split in the SI was the very one which must now be wrought in the vast and shapeless movement of present contestation: the split between, on the one hand, all the revolutionary reality of the epoch and, on the other hand, all the illusions on this subject.' And, at last, having been bored shitless by so much kitsch, we arrive at the denouement: 'May one cease admiring us as if we could be superior to our time; and may the epoch terrify itself by admiring itself *for what it is.*' (thesis 60). 'He who considers the life of the SI finds there the history of the revolution. Nothing has been able to sour it.' (thesis 61). The *Thèses* end with fireworks, just like New Years' Eve in Naples, and here as well – when the booze has gone – the dead and wounded are counted up and people realise that the 1st of January is no different to December 31st, that there has been no catharsis, no palingenetic entrance to a new age.[27]

The pompous sentences that constitute *Thèses sur l'Internationale Situationniste et son temps* were written simply to convince the SI's two 'survivors' that they didn't have to pay for their maximalistic narrow-mindedness, since such puffed up pedagogy isn't even good enough to hammer the pro-situs. 'Contemplation' of the SI and ideological endorsement of its programme are not a 'part of its historical success', on the contrary, they highlight the concrete failure of the situationists to unite theory and practice, praxis and organisation. The hollow pretensions of the pro-situs and the passivity of certain members of the SI were inescapable, they were written into the DNA of the group. Although this biological material was manipulated and modified during periodic purges, Sanguinetti and The Bore lacked the requisite knowledge of genetic engineering to achieve anything other than a botched job. It is pathetic of them to belatedly announce in thesis 60 that the SI couldn't rise above its age, because for years they spoke as if whatever happened in the class struggle would confirm the soundness of their theory.

To conclude, the SI did everything humanly possible to encourage its potential admirers to get turned on through contemplation of the organisation. Then, in order to retain the interest of those suitors who might otherwise have become jaded, Sanguinetti and The Bore feigned embarrassment at the declarations of love they'd inspired. Finding their amorous desires frustrated, the pro-situs and their *perfected* brethren were thrown into fresh paroxysms of lust, and this kept the marriage game moving inexorably on. Raoul Vaneigem tired of this soap-opera love-match in 1970, and left the group. On the occasion of this parting of ways, he wrote: 'For the present, it is enough for me to establish my deficiency in advancing a movement that I have always held as a condition of my radicality... Thus I prefer to take up again the bet that my adhesion to the SI had deferred: to vanish absolutely or to

remake my own coherence, and to remake it alone so as to remake it with the greatest number of people'.[28] Being a hedonist, Vaneigem recognised that in the aftermath of May 68, there were new girls he wished to seduce, and that the customs surrounding this ritual had changed. Instead of delaying consummation until the maiden's flesh was wrinkled, her youth vanished and the old suitor ran away, it was much smarter to join the fray of 'new sex'. The spinsters at the crochet club the SI was threatening to become, fell back on the tale of 'the fox and grapes'. 'We didn't want suitors! We didn't provoke them, it is all Miss Vaneigem's fault! Besides, we were so good-looking it was inevitable that somebody would try to seduce us...' This is an irreverent allegory, for sure, but not a false one. Anyway, the dissolution of the SI did not shake the world.

4. EPILOGUE ?

> *Furthermore, I don't consider it unusual to be lingering in a station of nihilism, it's just like sitting in a waiting room, half bored, half anticipating the ring of an alarm bell. People then turn into passengers, and we're surprised at the waiter still taking an order down. Given the disquieting mutation of our world, almost everyone should know the atmosphere in which we start doubting reason. It may just be a spectral dream.*
>
> Ernst Jünger (what a sad skunk!) 1982.

The upshot of all this is quite clear in the development of our argument, it is constantly suggested by the *Thèses sur l'Internationale Situationniste et son temps* and by the gaps in that text. There is no epilogue that can't already be read in the title,

Guy Debord is really dead, nunc est bibendum! In *Il Manifesto* of Sunday 4th December 1994, Enrico Ghezzi – a man of some merit – wrote: 'The news about Guy Debord's death seemed to me a deceit, *une leurre*. A sublime fraud, like the one many suspected behind Moana Pozzi's death. To be able to *détourne* his own death. To make it even more unreal than it already was, challenging it on the terrain of its own media grave... To end his personal history, not his era. To provide his life with a proper conclusion...' I had a very different understanding of these events. The Bore no longer had a choice, he had made his decision at least thirty years before, meticulously preparing himself for the moment when his time was up. *Deboredom* had set in, and The Bore was measuring out his life with wine corks. He was fated to die, sooner or later. His funeral was playing this game out to the bitter end.

NOTES

The notes marked by a *** didn't appear in the original text, they were added for the benefit of English language readers. Most of the notes are by the author, the odd comment, not always indicated, has been added by the editor of the English language text.

1. Guy The Bore is the double of Guy Debord, he is Debord in such a self-contemplative attitude that he became sheer image. In our opinion, a feeling of *deboredom* (i.e. the boredom caused by Debord) took hold of the would-be hero after the movie *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1979). Here, self-contemplation still met a lyric requirement, and wasn't tedious, (de)boring. As we'll explain later, after this date his texts were overwhelmed by resentment – a self-referential feeling which ended up in an emotional short-circuit. This feeling of deboredom was observable during the life-time of the SI, although it was mitigated because the individuals belonging to the organisation recognised collective revolutionary needs and expectations.
2. Letizia Moratti is the chairman of the board at RAI (RAdiotelevisione Italiana). RAI is the public broadcast company that competes with

Fininvest, Berlusconi's TV company. In March 1994 Berlusconi became Prime Minister, heading a government that was a synthesis of Poujadism, Fascist tendencies, Mafia alliances and neo-Thatcherite claptrap. The first 'enemy' to be attacked and defeated by the Government was RAI, whose very existence appeared to be an intolerable obstacle to the full *Fininvestisation* of the country. Berlusconians and post-fascists used to call RAI a lair of crypto-communists; actually it was a bolt-hole for soft-core leftists and former pro-situs, nevertheless RAI served the interests of the ruling class as much as Fininvest. Berlusconi instituted a new board of right-wing directors whose chairman was Mrs Letizia Moratti – 'chairman' is correct, some right-wing women refuse to use the feminine gender, we don't have a neuter in Italian and these Iron Maidens indicate their positions as if they were masculine. Moratti belongs to an influential Milanese family which, amongst other things, owns the Inter football club. The RAI coup was the only successful act of the Berlusconi Government, which was shaken and overthrown in November by a general strike led by the reformist unions. Berlusconi was too fetid and extreme to meet the requirements of the ruling class, who exploited the workers' struggles to establish an 'apolitical' emergency government headed by premier Lamberto Dini. However, Letizia Moratti is still where Berlusconi placed her.***

3. Vittorio Sgarbi, formerly an art critic, and Giuliano Ferrara, formerly a journalist, are two champions of the Right who talk in a very vulgar and insulting style. Sgarbi has a daily talk-show on Canale 5 (Fininvest), Ferrara is the ghost-writer of the Berlusconi's speeches and statements.***

4. Gian Carlo Pajetta and Enrico Berlinguer were powerful and respected bosses in the old communist party (PCI). Berlinguer was secretary general from 1969 until his death in 1985. He completed the destalinisation of the party and initiated its conversion into a social-democratic organisation.***

5. Today, it is perfectly acceptable to use the term 'situationism'. The SI chose to condemn the use of this word denoting a specific doctrine of *savoir vivre* that didn't actually exist: since everyone could be situationist without having heard of the SI, it followed that the notion of situationism was meaningless. It is not until 1977, in *Manoscritti antieconomici e antifilosofici del 1977* (an anonymous duplicated text) that we read: 'power swallows critique and recycles it. Marx became Marxism... in the same way the SI became situationism.' Power was able to swallow this particular critique thanks to those who turned situations

into situationism. Such an understanding was reasonably widespread by the late-eighties, which is why Jean Barrot's text *Critique Of The Situationist International* was renamed *What Is Situationism?* (Unpopular Books, London 1987) when it was issued as a pamphlet.

6. Carlo Freccero is a former pro-situ who became general manager of Italia 1 (Fininvest) in the late-eighties. He managed to produce TV shows which married commercial potential with post-modernist experimentalism, he was too independent and Berlusconi fired him. After the death of Guy The Bore, he penned an obituary for the communist newspaper *Il Manifesto.****

7. *Striscia la notizia* is a satirical daily news show that is edited by the former pro-situ Antonio Ricci and broadcast on Canale 5 (Finivest).***

8. Angelo Guglielmi is an ex-member of the 1960's literary 'avant-garde' clique *Gruppo 63*. For more than ten years he's been general manager of RAI3, the most post-modern and 'left-wing' public television channel. Most RAI3 shows begin as experimental programmes and became smash hits; e.g. *Blob,* an outrageous daily programme edited by the pro-situ Enrico Ghezzi, which features cut-ups and détournements of the news and other productions shown the day before on national TV. Nevertheless, RAI3 runs ugly cop-style programmes such as *Chi l'ha visto?* – a show based on missing person cases. In January 1995 its editorial staff were the victims of a prank by Luther Blissett.***

9. See the *Avertissement pour la troisième édition française,* in Guy Debord, *La societé du spectacle* (Gallimard, Paris 1992). Debord writes: 'This edition is identical to that of 1967... I am not the kind of man who corrects himself... Such a critical theory doesn't need to be transformed...'. In this short piece, The Bore refuses to take the 1989 collapse of state capitalism – and all the following events – into account, and is content with a reference to theses 58 and 111 of *The Society of The Spectacle*, as if this were all that needed to be written on the subject, a sort of Nostradamus' *centuriae* to which nothing can be added. In 1992 the Croatians and Serbs were already butchering each other, what can you do with such a hack-prophet?***

10. *Pro-situ* was the name given to the SI's lame and superficial ideological sympathisers, sad twerps such as Greg Dunnington and Lucy Forsyth, who ape the style of the organisation without sharing its rigour. For an example of the latter's vacuous prose, see the letter in *Vague* 21 (p. 94, London 1988), from which it is apparent that Forsyth hasn't read much of Stewart Home's *The Assault On Culture,* a text she pretends to criticise

when, in actual fact, the two points she raises as omissions are actually footnoted in the book! In *Comments On The Society Of The Spectacle* (1988), Debord wrote: 'On the ground of the post-1968 *contestation*, the inept recuperators called "pro-situs" have been the "first disinformers", because they dissimulated as much as possible the practical manifestations by which the very critique they claimed to share had become popular; without scrupling to weaken the proposition, they never cited anything or anybody, in order to create the impression that they had discovered something for themselves'. Incidentally, isn't this an anti-plagiarist statement? ***

11. In the original text, the author describes reading *The Veritable Split* as being like listening to Glenn Miller. This phrase cannot be translated into English. Glenn Miller was a trumpet player who provided a mass audience with a sanitised version of jazz, in Italian trumpet also means a windbag, someone who is puffed up. Anyone who has read Dante will be familiar with the phrase 'and he used his arse for a trumpet', which is one of the better known puns on the two meanings of the word.***

12. 'Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions d'organisation et action de la tendence situationniste internationale' (1958) in Mirella Bandini, *L'estetico il politico - da Cobra all'Internazionale situazionista*, L'Officina, Torino 1977.

13. Ralph Rumney's story resembles a work culled from the annals of the theatre of the absurd. First, Rumney was credited with founding the non-existent London Psychogeographical Association, which was immediately merged with the Lettrist International and International Movement For An Imaginist Bauhaus on the occasion of these groups being fused together as the Situationist International. Then, in 1958, Rumney was expelled from the SI because he was a few days late in furnishing Debord with a psychogeographical survey of Venice, having been 'distracted' by the birth of a son. Nine years later, the whole British section was expelled in unbelievable circumstances, not quite as described by Fred and Judy Vermorel in *The Sex Pistols* (presumably the revised 2nd edition, since the editor of this translation hasn't been able to find any references to the situationists while flicking through the 1st edition, Tandem, London 1978). Likewise, in the editor's opinion, one possible function of these exculsions was to create scapegoats that could bear the SI's failings – the resulting feeling of religious unity among those not excluded, naturally enough, would enable the sect to avoid confronting the real causes of its incoherence and internal disunity. This possibility is not raised by the Italian author and he may disagree

with the supposition.

14. See especially *Open Creation and Its Enemies*, Unpopular Books, London 1993.

15. Nash, 'Who are the Situationists?', in 'Times Literary Supplement' London. Quoted in Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture*, 2nd ed. AK Press, Edinburgh 1991, p.39.

16. Stewart Home, in the previously quoted work, p. 41. Home uses the term 'specto-situationists' (from 'spectacle') to distinguish the post-split Paris based SI from both the pre-1962 group, and the 2nd SI.

17. 'Art, as a category, must be distinguished from music, painting, writing &c. Current usage of the term art treats it as a sub-category of these disciplines; one which differentiates between parts of them on the basis of *perceived values*. Thus, the music of Mozart is considered art, while that of Slaughter and the Dogs is not. This use of the term art, which distinguishes between different musics, literatures, &c, emerged in the seventeenth-century at the same time as the concept of science. Before this, the term artist was used to describe cooks, shoe-makers, students of the liberal arts &c.

'When the term art emerged with its modern usage, it was an attempt on the part of the aristocracy to hold up the values of their *class* as objects of 'irrational reverence'. Thus art was equated with *truth*, and this *truth* was the world view of the aristocracy, a world view which would shortly be overthrown by the rising bourgeois class... (when the bourgeoisie) appropriated the concept of art it simultaneously transformed it. Thus beauty more or less ceased to be equated with truth, and became associated with individual taste. As art developed, 'the insistence on form and knowledge of form' and 'individualism' (basically romanticism) were added to lend 'authority' to the concept as a 'particular, evolving, mental set of the new ruling class'.

'Thus, rather than having universal validity, art is a process that occurs within bourgeois society and which leads to an 'irrational reverence for activities which suit bourgeois needs'. This process posits 'the objective superiority of those things singled out as art, and, thereby, the superiority of the form of life which celebrates them, and the social group which is implicated'... This is a conclusion very different to that reached by the specto-situationists... (who wanted to *realise* art). If art, from a materialist perspective, is a process which occurs in bourgeois society, there can be no question of its *realisation*. Such an idea is

mystical since it implies not only that art has an essence, but that as a category it is autonomous of social structures. To undertake its *realisation* and *suppression* is an attempt to *save* this mental set at the very moment the category is *abolished*. Art disappears from the museums *only* to reappear *everywhere!'*

Stewart Home, op. cit. p. 42-43. The internal quotations are from Roger L. Taylor, *Art: An Enemy of the People,* Harvester Press, Sussex, 1978.

18. *Manoscritti Antieconomici e antifilosofici*, quoted above.

19. Encyclopédie des Nuisances, *Considerazioni storiche sull'Internationale Situationniste*, edizioni 415, Torino 1994 (formerly *Abrégé,* Encyclopédie des Nuisances # 15, Aprile 1992. For info: Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 74 Rue de Ménilmontant, 75020 Paris, France.

20. *La véritable scission dans l'Internationale* (Champ Libre, Paris 1972). The Celtic editor of the present text had to use the atrocious English translation *The Veritable Split In The International: Public Circular of the Situationist International* (BM Piranha, London 1974), since this was the only edition to which he had access. Other notably bad book length translations of situationist texts into English are *On Terrorism And The State* by Gianfranco Sanguinetti (Chronos London 1982) and *In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni* by Guy Debord (Pelagian Press, London n.d.). In the *Preface to the Fourth Italian Edition of The Society Of The Spectacle,* The Bore suggests that bad translators should be spat upon and hit, I think this is rather harsh considering the huge favour his bad English translators have done him by preventing several of his more embarrassing texts from being widely read in Anglo-American circles.***

21. Some references to the Kommune 1 can be found in Richard Neville *Play Power*, (Jonathan Cape, London 1970, paperback edition Paladin, London 1971). See also *Counter Culture* edited by Joseph Berke (Peter Owen, London 1969). As regards the anti-authoritarian consciousness of the German '68 movement, see Hans-Jurgen Krahl *Konstitution und Klassenkampf*, Verlag Neue Kritik KG, Frankfurt a. M. 1971.

22. See Richard Neville, op. cit. and Fernanda Pivano, *Beat Hippie Yippie - Dall'underground alla controcultura*, Rizzoli, Milano 1978.

23. Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming?* Despite a vast array of misleading books and articles stating otherwise, several of which the Italian author of this text has clearly read, the Sex Pistols were not influenced by the

situationists. More than anything else, this seventies rock group modelled itself upon sixties beat combos such as the Small Faces and the Who.

24. For a good example of a servile Debord centred historical account, see Jean-François Martos, *Histoire de l'Internationale Situationniste*, ed. Gérard Lebovici, Paris 1989.

25. According to Tommaso Labranca, *Trash* culture is unsophisticated popular culture. It is coarse and inconsistent, therefore it has to be buried under tons of 'good taste'. The middle class is as trashy as the working class, but the latter are not ashamed of their 'bad' taste, while the former, wishing to appear *savoir faire,* pose as thoroughbred and by this means become kitsch. The characteristics of 'proletarian' *Trash* culture are unintentional genre cross-fertilisation, incongruity, aesthetic maximalism and the emulative syndrome.***

26. *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, op. cit.

27. In southern Italy, especially Naples, New Year's Day culminates in the destruction of unwanted household furniture, which is thrown off the balcony and into the street. In addition, the arrival of midnight is announced with a riot of fireworks, petards and firecrackers. Inevitably, this results in some individuals being found dead or wounded in the street. It should go without saying that this is a pagan cathartic feast which the Christian church decided it was best not to suppress.***

28. Vaneigem, *Letter of Resignation*, included as an appendix to *The Veritable Split* (Piranha p. 110).***

APPENDIX 1

Extract from "A Field Study in the Dwindling Force of Cognition, where it is Least Expected: a Critique of the Situationist International as a Revolutionary Organization" by Robert Chasse & Bruce Elwell (1970).

From mid-1966, situationist texts found some small distribution here: 'The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy' and the 'Address to Algerian Workers...' and, most importantly, Vaneigem's *The Totality for Kids*, the critical import of these works struck home in small groups which were then sifting through critical traditions in search for the method (the way of thinking) that had practically disappeared from the social landscape. There was an interest in who the situationists might be, and there was some activity of independent translation of SI texts.

In march 1967 Tony Verlaan – who had been involved in the Strasbourg scandal, and who was to take the part of the SI against the Garnautin ideologues – arrived in New York. From his arrival the practical engagement of the SI here can be marked. He brought with him a letter signed by Debord and Vaneigem in the name of the SI: 'Comrade Verlaan has all our confidence and can take in our name any useful contacts during his stay in the United States.'

Verlaan was then outside the SI (he would not become a member until January 1968), yet he was mandated: he could speak in the name of the organization, make on the scene judgments for it, officially enjoying all confidence – an 'all' excluding the critical confidence which membership implied. The imperatives of establishing direct contacts here may have been obvious, but the manner in which the relationship was established to this end continued the centralist line of development that the SI was also attempting to surpass: the manner in which he was mandated was implicitly hierarchical and non-transparent, and stood in contradiction to the direct democratic practice the SI was developing.

Verlaan immediately took his mandate to include the opening of

an SI post office box, and although situationists were not consulted they greeted the action with approval when they learned of it.

Knowing that british situationists were preparing a translation of Khayati's Strasbourg brochure - but impatient with their progress – Verlaan translated, rewrote and printed an edition of 10, 000 *On the Poverty of Student Life* in the name of the SI. This was also done without consulting situationists anywhere along the line. The translation was bad, the rewriting to an american situation (of which he had only the first impressions) was somewhat off-center, and the printing was atrocious. The SI at first also acknowledged this with approval. In *Internationale Situationiste* 11, the french section included the *On the Poverty...* booklet in a photograph of the various editions of the Strasbourg text.

Verlaan's practical activity during his first six months in the US centered around *Black Mask* which centered around Benn Morea. The first manifestation of *Black Mask,* the 'closing' of the Museum of Modern Art in October 1966 had generated a certain interest. From afar the situationists saw in this act a possible revolutionary development. 'But to what could be a clear beginning succeeds the show of opposition, centered around putting bodies in the street, street meetings, picket lines, going to the people, as the contemptuous saying goes' *(Robin Hood).* Those in the socialist perspective would have called *Black Mask* adventurist, but adventure as playful unfolding was completely missing. Verlaan's participation in *Black Mask* was public: demonstrations, the printing of a section of *On the Poverty...* first in its bulletin, a signed article and immediately preceding his break with Morea, a signature on an atrocious anti-art manifesto.

Although during this period Verlaan never – to our knowledge – openly stated he was a situationist, his speech and activity in its name led some (perhaps most who came in touch with him) to assume he was. His defacto membership in *Black Mask* could then, organizationally, be viewed as entrism (particularly identified in *Ten Days...* as *the* enemy). At any rate, more mundanely, it was natural to assume association between *Black Mask* and the SI. It was also natural – given the existence of *Black Mask* in that gossipy suburb of the mind called the 'left' – that the impression of association would survive the termination of relationships.

We had met Verlaan the night of his arrival in New York.

Contact between the three of us was at first limited, although there was in common a certain affinity for the SI (at least of its better known theories and of its critical method). By late summer 1967, when the three of us first talked at any length, an appreciation for the SI – for its evolving apprehension of direct democratic practice on a coherent base – was common.

From this point the attempt to form a coherent group – to develop autonomous activity – can be dated, although it was hardly articulated then. Personal relations between the three of us were not marked by strain, and although the different paths we had travelled to a common critical awareness still separated us (Verlaan remained with Morea, and with an activist outlook, Elwell remained a subculture anarchist), there was radical possibility in what was shared.

Verlaan took up printing activity in earnest in the early fall of 1967, editions of *Ten Days...*, *The Totality for Kids*, 'The Decline and Fall...,' etc. He broke with Morea over the latter's manoeuvers to get National SDS to support a 'Zengakuren style' snake dance through the streets of Washington on october 15th, the day which would see the Pentagon 'confrontation.' This break, in retrospect, is seen as essentially tactical; it was not the activist approach that Verlaan effectively rejected, but what, in his judgment, were its excesses.

We published – under the name of the Council for the Liberation of Daily Life – three of Chasse's texts on the ghetto insurrections of the previous summer (as *Hall of Mirrors)*, appropriating an anarchist post office box to do so. There was talk of a collective booklet aimed at the so-called New Left.

* * *

Raoul Vaneigem arrived in New York in mid-november. Discussion with him cleared up for us all the role of the SI in the Strasbourg scandal and in the exclusion of the Garnautins which followed. During his short stay he declined to meet with Morea, a little fact that would come to have some significance. Verlaan attended an SDS regional conference in New Jersey, finding many people of interest there. Chasse, Elwell and Vaneigem attended for an afternoon but found the bureaucratic stultification of the workshops to be an old story. It was clear to us that any people of interest in SDS could not be approached through their own apparatus. Murray Bookchin, anarcho-bolshevik theoretician and

former associate of ours (from whom we had separated organizationally – with the 'formation' of the council – although personal contacts were still maintained) returned from Europe at that point. He and Vaneigem debated the organizational practices of the SI (discussion which ranged from Morea and militantism to the role of subjectivity and the character of negation). There was particular emphasis on a recent break between situationists and a group of young anarchists. Elwell, who was then in correspondence with one of these anarchists, found the revelations concerning the irresponsible practices of this group disturbing, but felt the need to verify this in the correspondence, and so stated.

Vaneigem asked Chasse and Verlaan if they wished to become situationists, and they stated that they did not – at least in the moment. (Elwell was not asked. It was thought then that he was not on quite the same grounds, an impression especially conveyed in discussion over the nature of the proletariat and its existence as the negation of class society. The matter was to be quickly clarified.) Late in 1967 we were on SI grounds. To make our adhesion to the SI meaningful, we saw the necessity for writing at least one important text that would at once reveal the appropriation of the critical method and place our text in the same line as those of the SI. The point was not to express an exercise in theoretical writings, but to express our capacity for applying the critical method to specific american conditions. Our adhesion then would be simply the recognition of what existed, and the expression of a mutual critical confidence, rather than the adhesion expressing the confidence of the SI in the possibility of our capacities, a one-way approval.

In the weeks that followed Vaneigem's departure Bookchin attempted a broad anarchist alliance, a dismal failure; he also accused Verlaan of attempting to bureaucratically manipulate SDS into withholding support from the Stop-the-Draft Week. Elwell put his break with Bookchin's bolshevik practices in writing. We were acting and reacting as a group; unevenness – retardation – was disappearing in the daily practice of a radical combination.

Meanwhile, Morea wrote to the SI asking why Vaneigem had taken the word of the 'shitheads Verlaan and Chasse' and refused to see him. The answer, signed by members of the french section and newly formed british one, was relatively mild in dealing with Morea's militantism, stressing instead his relations with an obvious mystic

(whom Vaneigem had met). The letter also announced that Chasse and Verlaan were situationists and would act as members of the SI everywhere did. A copy of this letter was sent to Chasse and Verlaan along with a letter (to them) recognizing them as situationists and making certain organizational directives, including the destruction of *On the Poverty...* (along with certain other texts printed by Verlaan in the name of the SI), and the holding of all further breaks – if at all possible – until the arrival of a delegate from Europe. The implicit critical confidence extended by virtue of making them members was withdrawn – or at least put in doubt – in the request to hold further action pending the arrival of a situationist from elsewhere.

The SI was only around that time beginning – internationally – to work out direct democratic practice. Its basis would be that the critical confidence in a member was ipso facto confidence in his capacity for autonomous activity as a member, and that sections – groupings of such individuals – would also have that capacity. In contradiction to this evolving practice was, when in a clutch – when something had to be decided – the organization's centralist practice, which is also the 'practice' of daily life. In this practice, it came quite naturally that those at the 'center' should think it necessary to check our decisions (to choose for us the 'tactical' moment of our adhesion, to ask us to hold decisions until the arrival of a delegate).

Our reactions were as one, if somewhat confused. In the reply (signed by the three of us) we already rejected this move to undercut our autonomy and generally criticized the character of the measures taken, but with this confusion: we simultaneously argued as if we were members and as if we were not. This confusion can be seen as rooted in an implicit apprehension of the necessities of international organization, and in our hedges that the SI was that organization. Though arguing both sides of the question, we concluded our reply formally outside the SI, signing it as the Council for the Liberation of Daily Life. The SI had previously made its stand against entrism public; if it was aware of the confusions created by these 'contending memberships,' it would not – in reply to us – take up the question directly (what struck the SI, rightly, was the unusualness of a non-member acting as a member; a situation it was at least partly responsible for by way of its mandate to Verlaan). Nine months later – after Verlaan had become a situationist and at the point where we were planning a journal for the Council – the SI stated that in view

of our continued separate existence, Verlaan would have to choose one organization or the other, to avoid dual membership.

Parenthetically: in our reply, we agreed to the destruction of the texts, as requested, thus recognizing that these texts were in the name of the SI and that they should have the say. Later, when we arranged to move Verlaan's belongings (he was then out of town) from an apartment he vacated, we discovered many boxes of *On the Poverty...* and other texts, the destruction of which had been requested, so we simply carried out the SI's instructions. Verlaan was enraged on the discovery of this. His plans for destruction, it seems, consisted of a massive distribution on college campuses. (Many recognize the university as a key point of destruction of critical thought, but this recognition can come from different perspectives.) Before the destruction was requested – before Vaneigem's arrival – Verlaan himself had recognized the superiority of the british translation (published with introductory comment and postscript as *Ten Days That Shook the University)* and reprinted an edition of it. In early 1969, following the formation of the american section, it was agreed that Verlaan would undertake from California the reprinting of *Ten Days..* and the Vaneigem booklet. It was decided that the new edition of *Ten Days . . .* would have certain comics (which he had done prior to the formation of the section) as foldout from the back cover, and that a panel from the same would be on the front cover. The new edition arrived in New York with panels from various situationist comics scattered throughout and with the title of his translation substituted for *Ten Days . . .* His unilateral decisions to make these changes were never mentioned in the process. (It had been agreed that the title of Vaneigem's booklet would be changed from *The Totality for Kids* to *Fundamental Banalities;* the new edition arrived bearing the old title. Again, with no stated reasons, nor any notification.)

All this is a matter of small incidents (the like of which the ongoing activity of an organization is made) and is merely noted here to illustrate the fact that Verlaan's practical relation with the revolutionary organization did not appreciably change with his formal adhesion to it, and that, for reasons which seemed perfectly valid to him – and which he felt confident he did not have to explain – he never hesitated to discard previous common decisions, without explanations of his reasons, and without notification.

Bookchin entered the fray as partisan of the 'ill-treated' Morea, citing the reasons given to Morea for Vaneigem's refusal to see him as other than those given in New York by us. The british section answered him (with a copy to Morea), saying that someone was obviously lying – a safe assumption in broader context, but implying this someone could be Vaneigem, in whom their critical confidence, presumably, was assumed.

Their hedging was apparently rooted to their belief that Verlaan wasn't of SI caliber. (It became clear that its real roots were in their view of Morea's utility in an 'advanced' anglo-american sphere of activity, where both Vaneigem and Verlaan were nothing.)

Before the end of 1967, the three british situationists had been excluded from the SI for their refusal to break definitively with Bookchin and Morea. They were excluded, as it were, for their willful maintenance of the organizational confusion in which the SI found itself. The subsequent action of those excluded would be – as had been the case with the Garnautins – confirmation of the necessities of the exclusion. In *IS* 12 (september 1969), the french section would make critical commentary on the affair of the british section, but it would not there – or elsewhere – publicly deal with the affair in its totality, as it related to the problem of centralization. The situation was apparently transcended with the exclusion of the british, who in the name of spheres of activity had been the excessive force toward centralization. What matters in revolutionary organization is not simply the deletion of a problem (which can turn out to be a matter of suppressing an antagonism) but the conscious mastery of its own history. The american section in *Situationist International* 1 (june 1969) made no reference to these matters at all.

Chris Gray, who was to have been the SI delegate, arrived in New York the day after his exclusion. Each of the three of us discussed the affair with him and drew our own conclusions. During the month Gray was in New York, Verlaan – due to a crisis in his private life – left for Europe, after distributing SI materials at an SDS National. In Paris, he reversed his previous common stand with us and became a member of the SI. (He would in recounting conversations in Paris stress that Chasse was a bit too formalist, a theme he would play in many variations in the next two years – his becoming a member should have revealed to us the little matter that organizational questions were for him.) From Paris, he proceeded to

London, staying with the ex-situationists there. He would, as a result, question the exclusion of the british; but the majority of the SI sharply rejected this and he dropped the matter. (His apprehension of organization, in many ways quite similar to that of the british, at that point, should have been accessible to the SI as a whole.) As for Gray, he would eventually become – as *King Mob Echo* - british public relations front for that union of Morea and the mystic who had appalled Vaneigem: the Motherfuckers. An evolution with all the logic of dry rot.

This extract represents just under six pages of a forty-six page pamphlet. The original spelling and punctuation have been retained, as has the clearly conscious decision to use capitalisation sparsely. While the text was apparently composed in 'English', it reads as if it is a literal translation from some dead metaphysical language. For example, while the use of the term 'apprehension' is technically correct, in places there is a strong temptation to read this as meaning 'fear'; using a word such as 'grasp' would have avoided this confusion. The order of the narrative also becomes somewhat jumbled at one point, since this section of Chasse and Elwell's text concerns events preceding their brief membership of the SI; nevertheless, while discussing Verlaan's disregard of collective decisions, they leap forward to the period in which they did belong to the group. Likewise, it is unfortunately necessary to state that it's possible to view this text as being highly revealing about the internal organisation of the SI, without actually adhering to all – or indeed any- of the opinions expressed in it.

Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, the Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea and the Black Mask Group, is available for £5 from *Unpopular Books*, Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

APPENDIX 2

Letter of Fredy Perlman to Roger Gregoire and Linda Lanphear, 1969 as published in *Having Little, Being Much*, by Lorraine Perlman (Black & Red, Detroit 1989 pp72-3).

Dear Aparatchiki,

Your recent letters would have meant much more if a carbon of one and the original of the other had not been sent to a functionary of the Situationist International as part of an application for membership. The logic of your arguments would be impressive if it had not been designed to demonstrate your otrhodoxy in situationist doctrine. The sincerity of your "rupture with Fredy Perlman and Black and Red" would be refreshing if it had not been calculated to please a Priest of a Church which demands dehumanizing confessions as a condition of adherence. You're a toady.

The odor is made more unpleasant by the fact that you chose to approach the Situationist International precisely in its period of great purges (Khayati, Chasse, Elwell, Vaneigem, Etc.). Some people joined the Communist Party precisely at the time of Stalin's great purges. [. . .] Unfortunately, seen through the 3-D glasses you're wearing today I'm missing the point. I am talking about *all other bureaucratic* organizations, not about the Situationist International. Its bureaucrats aren't bureaucrats. Its purges aren't purges. Its ideology is not ideology: it is practice; whose practice? the anti-bureaucratic practice of the proletarians; this is the practice that justifies the intimidations, insults, confessions, purges which are necessary to keep Coherence coherent. This Organization is unique: unlike all the Stalinist Parties, unlike the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals, the Situationist International is itself the world revolutionary movement, so that one does not apply to Verlaan for membership but for an "autonomous positive existence within the international revolutionary movement" (your letter to Verlaan).

THE OLD IDEALIST FALLACY OF HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDING INTO UNCONSCIOUS MATTER...

"Debord and Sanguinetti conclude thesis 22 of *Thèses sur l'Internationale Situationniste et son temps* with the extraordinary claim that situationist theory – i.e. the theory of the proletariat, as stated in thesis 3 of the same text – even if it is often misunderstood and deformed, 'will know how to return in all its authenticity each time historically that its hour is come, beginning with today even. We have left behind the epoch where we could be falsified or effaced *without appeal,* because from now on our theory benefits, for better and for worse, from the *collaboration* of the masses.' According to Sanguinetti and Debord, the SI's 'historical success' lies in persuading the masses to 'collaborate' in the elucidation of proletarian theory, i.e. in persuading the proletariat to collaborate with itself! Examining the text more closely, it becomes apparent that the 'theory of the proletariat' was not formulated by the class itself, but, in the end, the class was allowed to *co-elaborate* this theory. 'Co' means 'together with'... With whom? Who was co-starring in this articulation of class theory if not the SI?

"In short, this is the old idealist fallacy of Holy Spirit descending into unconscious matter, of 'consciousness being brought in from outside'. There, standing against the light, is the decrepit figure of the 'separate intellectual' who 'goes towards the people.' Drawing on the legacy of Russian populism, Bakunin and Lenin had previously made an identical error; history repeats itself, the first time as farce, the second as tragedy and finally, as the Situationist International. And despite the bald references to 'historical struggles', this theory turns out to be meta-historical, ready to reveal itself whenever the time is right."

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